

VZCZCXYZ0000  
OO RUEHWEB

DE RUEHUL #4233/01 3460541  
ZNY CCCCC ZZH  
O 120541Z DEC 06  
FM AMEMBASSY SEOUL  
TO RUEHC/SECSTATE WASHDC IMMEDIATE 1849  
INFO RUEHGB/AMEMBASSY BAGHDAD PRIORITY 0071  
RUEHBJ/AMEMBASSY BEIJING PRIORITY 1714  
RUEHBY/AMEMBASSY CANBERRA PRIORITY 8318  
RUEHMO/AMEMBASSY MOSCOW PRIORITY 7710  
RUEHKO/AMEMBASSY TOKYO PRIORITY 1815  
RHHMUNA/CDR USPACOM HONOLULU HI PRIORITY  
RUEKJCS/CJCS WASHINGTON DC PRIORITY  
RHMFISS/COMUSFK SEOUL KOR PRIORITY  
RHMFISS/COMUSKOREA J5 SEOUL KOR PRIORITY  
RUEKJCS/JOINT STAFF WASHINGTON DC PRIORITY  
RUEKJCS/JOINT STAFF WASHINGTON DC//J-5// PRIORITY  
RHEHNSC/NSC WASHINGTON DC PRIORITY  
RUEKJCS/SECDEF WASHINGTON DC PRIORITY  
RUEKJCS/SECDEF WASHINGTON DC//OSD/ISA/EAP// PRIORITY

C O N F I D E N T I A L SEOUL 004233

SIPDIS

SIPDIS

E.O. 12958: DECL: 10/10/2016  
TAGS: [PARM](#) [PREL](#) [MNUC](#) [KNNP](#) [KN](#) [KS](#)  
SUBJECT: AMBASSADOR'S INITIAL CALL ON ROK DEFENSE MINISTER  
KIM JANG-SOO

Classified By: AMB. ALEXANDER VERSHBOW. REASONS 1.4 (b/d).

¶1. (C) SUMMARY: During the Ambassador's December 11 office call on the new ROK Defense Minister, General Kim Jang-soo:

-- The Ambassador congratulated him on his elevation to head the Ministry of National Defense and said he looked forward to continued close consultations on U.S.-ROK Alliance issues.

-- Minister Kim voiced strong support for the Alliance and vowed to work closely with the Embassy and USFK to further its transformation. He asked the USG to be mindful of the impact U.S. military transformation will have on the ROK military.

-- He assured the Ambassador that despite a serious debate within the National Assembly over withdrawal of ROK forces from Iraq, the ROKG would extend its troop dispatch through ¶2007. The Ambassador thanked MND for its strong commitment and praised the valuable work being done by its Zaytun unit in Irbil.

-- They agreed on the importance of setting a firm date for OPCON transfer. However, Minister Kim stressed that the ROK needed to be prepared and ready for that responsibility. He also cautioned that the decision on timing would be made by political, not military leaders.

-- Minister Kim was optimistic the Jikdo air-to-surface training range would be fully operational by February 2007 and claimed the Pilsung Range had been "plentifully delegated" to USFK for its use in the interim.

-- He expressed concern USFK will downsize its forces on the Peninsula as a result of U.S. dissatisfaction with the 2007-2009 SMA negotiation. He urged the USG to view the agreement as a step toward the ROK assuming a more equal share of the burdensharing cost.

-- The Ambassador encouraged fuller ROK participation in PSI and welcomed the ROKG decision to join the Secure Freight Initiative (SFI).

-- Minister Kim said he would like to visit Washington to meet with the SECDEF as soon as possible after his swearing-in ceremony. He also welcomed future visits by Secretary Gates to the Republic of Korea. END SUMMARY.

SIPDIS

12. (C) On December 11, 2006, the Ambassador paid a visit on the newly-installed ROK Minister of National Defense, General Kim Jang-soo. Minister Kim noted that the Ambassador was the first foreign official he had met since he was sworn into office on November 24. The Ambassador congratulated him on his selection to head MND and said he looked forward to continued close consultations with the Ministry on U.S.-ROK Alliance issues. The Ambassador noted General Kim was a familiar face to American officials, owing to his previous assignments as Deputy Commander of the U.S.-ROK Combined Forces Command (2004-2005) and as ROK Army Chief of Staff (2005-2006). We know the Ministry is in very good hands, the Ambassador said.

13. (C) Defense Minister Kim thanked the Ambassador for his comments. He cited several speeches the Ambassador had recently delivered in support of the Alliance, saying he had greatly appreciated his remarks. The Minister predicted his own past experience working with USFK would have a positive influence on the overall well-being of the U.S.-ROK Alliance. He vowed to work closely with the Embassy and USFK to further Alliance transformation.

#### ALLIANCE TRANSFORMATION

14. (C) Defense Minister Kim raised the issue of U.S. military transformation, commenting that while he agreed with the necessity of U.S. military changes, we needed to be mindful of the impact it would have on the ROK armed forces. He and the Ambassador agreed that transformation of both the U.S. and ROK militaries was a win-win scenario. The Ambassador said his optimism stemmed in part from the ROK's ambitious 2020 Defense Reform Plan, which demonstrated the South Korean Government's strong commitment to the further strengthening of its own defense forces, and the raising of its technological capabilities and level of readiness. He also expressed appreciation for South Korea's willingness to contribute to operations around the world, in Iraq, Afghanistan and Lebanon, noting that the ROK was truly a global partner.

#### IRAQ TROOP RENEWAL

15. (C) Minister Kim told the Ambassador the ROK was making what he called "a conscientious effort to stand with the United States on the world stage." However, he acknowledged that many in the National Assembly and South Korean populace, disagreed with the ROKG's plan to extend its Zaytun troop dispatch to Irbil through 2007. Despite that strong opposition, Minister Kim told the Ambassador that the ROKG will "not even speak of withdrawing the troops." He predicted there would be a reduction in ROK troop levels over the next year, but assured the Ambassador that the ROK is committed to retaining its presence in Irbil through 2007. Kim added that in the course of the national debate, MND has had to face the added difficulty of defending its request for increases in its defense budget against questioning by the National Assembly over Iraq and other expenditures.

16. (C) The Ambassador thanked MND for its continuing commitment in Iraq. He praised the work of the Zaytun unit, and the widely-acknowledged success of the technical vocational training program it is operating in the northern part of the country, and stressed how important it is that it continue.

#### OPCON TRANSFER

¶7. (C) On the subject of the transfer of wartime operational control (OPCON) to the ROK, the Ambassador stressed the need to move ahead on implementation before the issue becomes entangled in the politics of the 2007 ROK presidential race. He said OPCON transfer is the right decision for the future of the Alliance. He highlighted the need for the U.S. and ROK to come to an agreement on a precise date for the transfer, predicting that domestic political anxiety over the issue would dissipate after a firm date has been set.

¶8. (C) Defense Minister Kim said he fully agreed, stating it would be mutually beneficial for both countries to reach consensus on a firm date. However, he also stressed the importance of taking into consideration the preparations that the ROK needed to put in place in order to be ready to take over the responsibility for wartime operational control. He further cautioned that while most of the work would be carried out by U.S. and ROK military experts, the date for OPCON transfer would be decided by the political, not the military, leaders of both countries.

#### TRAINING RANGES

¶9. (C) The Ambassador expressed appreciation for the role former Defense Minister Yoon had played in moving the Jikdo air-to-surface training range toward completion. He asked Minister Kim for his assistance in ensuring USFK had access to adequate training facilities in the interim, given the fact that winter weather conditions now appeared to be delaying the completion of the Jikdo training facility. Minister Kim thanked the U.S. side for its "common understanding and common patience" over the issue. He said he was optimistic that the range would be fully operational

by February 2007, barring very severe weather conditions, and that the Pilsung Range had been "plentifully delegated" to USFK for its use in the interim. Minister Kim said that if USFK had any further training requirements, he would instruct his Joint Chiefs of Staff to fully address them.

#### SMA

¶10. (C) The Ambassador and the Minister both acknowledged that the outcome of the recently completed Special Measures Agreement was not entirely satisfactory to the United States.

Kim said he nonetheless hoped the USG understood it as a step toward the ROK assuming a more equal share of USFK's non-personnel stationing costs. He expressed concern USFK would downsize its forces on the Peninsula as a result of the shortfall in the agreement, saying it was important for USFK to maintain its current force level despite its disappointment. The Ambassador replied that he too hoped that changes in force structure would not be necessary, but warned Minister Kim that adjustments might be needed. He assured him, however, that any adjustments would be carried out with no diminution of U.S. capabilities and no diminishment of the U.S. commitment to the Alliance. Minister Kim agreed it was extremely important that be the case in light of the October North Korean nuclear test, and the revived prospects for the Six-Party Talks later in December.

#### PSI

¶11. (C) The Ambassador stressed the U.S. desire to work closely with the ROK on Proliferation Security Initiative (PSI) activities and full implementation of UNSCR 1718. Minister Kim replied that the ROKG supported the "purpose and principles" of PSI and would participate fully in 6 of the 8 PSI areas of cooperation. He added there was more good news to be found in the ROKG's agreement to join the Secure Freight Initiative (SFI).

#### TRAVEL TO WASHINGTON

-----  
¶12. (C) Defense Minister Kim stated that he would like to visit Washington to meet with the SECDEF as soon as possible after his swearing-in ceremony. He also welcomed any future visits by Secretary Gates to the Republic of Korea. Minister Kim said he looked forward to discussing U.S.-ROK Alliance issues with the Secretary and pledged to the Ambassador that he would do all he could to further strengthen U.S.-ROK relations. "Coming directly from active duty, I may lack the political finesse to be a good Minister," General Kim said, "but rest assured I have the best of intentions toward our Alliance."

VERSHBOW